



12 October 2005



## **SAFETY ALERT** **Long Weekend Tragedies**

1. Vehicle fatalities were a hot topic at my Commanders Safety Council meeting yesterday. To summarize what was discussed, we were reasonably successful at curbing vehicle fatalities over the first 10 months of fiscal year 2005, but we have not been successful over the last couple months.
2. In September, two relatively seasoned noncommissioned officers died in motorcycle crashes. Now, just 10 days into the new fiscal year, car crashes have claimed the lives of two Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division. They died over the long Columbus Day weekend in head-on collisions. Alcohol is suspected to be a factor in both accidents. In both cases, the driver crossed the centerline into oncoming traffic. The picture below shows the horrific aftermath of one of those collisions.



3. We cannot attribute this kind of carnage to bad luck, because it is not about bad luck; it is about being effective as leaders—from me, through you, and down to and including first-line supervisors.

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4. We are going to reverse this trend. We cannot allow all the great and wonderful things that we accomplish every day to be overshadowed by our failure to effectively impact on Soldiers' behavior. Leaders: we must be visible to those we are charged with leading. E-mail messages do not cut it. Safety briefings alone do not cut it. What works is one-on-one caring complemented by concerned discussions and agreements between Soldiers and their first-line supervisors. This process, called *Under the Oak Tree Counseling*, is explained in detail in the recently revised Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 3, Safety. Leaders must influence first-line supervisors, who in turn must engage with their Soldiers and influence their behavior.

5. Beyond that one-on-one effort, we must follow through with systematic checks. This includes checks to make sure performance is to standard. Opportunities for leaders are checks at the gate, in motor pools, at local hangouts, and anywhere else deemed necessary to provide extra emphasis on how much we care for one another. This also includes working with local police to make roadside checks. Look at the 82d Airborne Division. They have not lost a Soldier in an accident for, at last count, 267 days. Their chain of command is clearly engaged and being effective. Our goal is *No Loss of Life*. Up and down the chain of command, we need to keep that attainable goal as our objective. This needs to be fundamental in everything we do. Take tough care and stay battle-ready to execute with excellence Any Mission, Anywhere.



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General, US Army  
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